

Historic Zone, Block Study  
Bounded by Calle del Sol, Calle de la Cruz,  
Calle de la Luna, and Calle San Jose  
San Juan Antiguo  
Isleta de San Juan  
Puerto Rico

HABS No. PR-61

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WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

## HISTORIC ZONE, BLOCK STUDY

HABS No. PR-61

LOCATION: A block of eighteen buildings located north of Plaza de Armas and the Alcaldia and defined by San Jose, Sol, Cruz, and Luna Streets, San Juan Antiguo, Isleta de San Juan, Puerto Rico

PRESENT USE: Residential and commercial

SIGNIFICANCE: This block, a typical division of San Juan Antiguo, is composed of eighteen one-, two-, and three-story masonry buildings facing directly onto surrounding streets. Most of these buildings were built during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as one and two-story single-family houses, each with a courtyard or patio. Shops or warehouses occupied ground level spaces with the family housed above. While several of these buildings have been restored, many are in bad repair or have been extensively modified to accommodate small business and multi-family low-income housing.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

This block of houses was probably started in the sixteenth century, judging from its proximity to the area around the Cathedral, the city's original nucleus. A few historical facts about the city can be of help in drawing conclusions about the block's origins. As early as 1529 there were about 100 houses in San Juan. In 1598, Layfield wrote that this city was larger than Portsmouth and smaller than Oxford. He pointed out that during the three preceding years much construction had been going on. In the early 1700s, the city hall was moved to its present site. When the Dutch burned the city about 144 houses were damaged. Hurricanes and earthquakes caused much destruction also. At the beginning the houses had large gardens but later on most of the open space was built upon. Also many houses were enlarged and turned into two-story houses to cope with the housing problems.

In the eighteenth century the city had six streets lengthwise and six crosswise. The block studied was bounded by the ones known as San Jose, Luna, Cruz, and Sol. The names of the streets have changed at different times. In 1902 Luna Street was named Rafael Cordero Street in honor of a local cigar maker who used to teach neighborhood children. Cruz Street was formerly called Calle de la Cruz de Santa Barbara due to the fact that it started on the hill in a place where there was a shrine dedicated to Santa Barbara and a rather large wooden cross on a stone pedestal. From that point the neighbors watched the Atlantic Ocean looking for the Spanish galleons that brought Mexican gold to the capital. Sol Street was also known in the eighteenth century as San Cristobal Street due to the fact that the entrance to the Fort San Cristobal was across that street.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Exteriors:

1. Overall frontages:

- a. Calle de San Jose: 230'
- b. Calle Luna: 286'
- c. Calle Sol: 282'
- d. Calle de la Cruz: 229'

2. Walls: Masonry or reinforced concrete; brick stone and earth (mamposteria) with stucco finishes painted in pastel shades of grey, green, blue, and yellow-ochre. Although they were constructed at different times, most of these buildings share party walls. Most walls, both exterior and interior, extend above roof lines as parapets. Cornices occur near roof levels or at parapets.
3. Structural systems: Bearing wall construction, post and beam in concrete and/or wood, reinforced concrete slab and beam construction, or layers of 5" x 12" unglazed ceramic tiles separated by mortar beds and resting on wood strips at 12" on center supported by wood beams bearing on masonry walls.

4. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Typical doorways are simple rectangular openings with stucco surrounds in neo-classic styles of plain pilasters and entablature or round-arched openings with a louvered or wrought iron grille.

Doors at street level usually occur as one or two doors per opening. The typical door is made of heavy planks nailed vertically on the exterior of a rectangular wood frame. Nail heads are exceedingly heavy. Doors open inward. Some doors are of wood louvers, usually still in operable condition. Some doorways have wrought iron gates. Several commercial establishments have widened openings or remodelled facades at ground level to accommodate metal and glass store fronts.

- b. Windows: Window openings usually have two wood louvered shutters opening outward, with solid wood shutters in the same opening swinging inward.
5. Roofs: Roofs are basically flat, with only a slight slope for drainage purposes. They are made of ceramic brick or exposed concrete.

6. Balconies: Balconies are either full or shallow, open or roofed. Balcony floors are supported by cantilever wood beams on concrete brackets and extending slabs. Balustrades are of turned wood balustres, cast or wrought iron, and concrete. Balcony roofs are of brick, galvanized metal, or concrete slabs and are supported by wrought iron brackets, or wood or metal columns.
7. Decorative features: In general, ornament is executed in stucco and in derivations of neoclassic details. An exception is Calle de la Cruz #154 with pendant-like forms terminated in clusters of fruit in bas-relief facade decorations.
8. Hardware: There is an abundance of early hardware within this complex, including typical "capuchin" hinges, sliding bolts, and miscellaneous fragments of block locks.
9. Landscape: All of the structures in this block face directly on the sidewalk. All of the courtyards and patios are paved with cement or tiles from the Canary Islands, except for the courtyards of Calle San Jose #101 and Calle del Sol #150 (HABS No. PR-117). These two buildings have been restored and have formal gardens.

### PART III. SOURCES

Brau, Salvador. Puerto Rico y su historia. 1894.

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Ledru, Andre Pierre. Journey to the Island of Puerto Rico in 1797. (Translation by Julio L. de Vizcarrondo). 1957.

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